

Colonel (Retired) Gilberto Villahermosa
Testimony to the New York City Council
In Support of Resolutions No. 103
Urging the President and Congress to Sign H.R. 1726 and S.1174
To Award a Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment, Known as
the Borinqueneers

23 May 2014

Committee Room, New York City Hall

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen of the New York City Council Committee on Veterans – Thank you for your invitation to appear here today before you and to testify on behalf of Resolution No. 103 urging the President of the United States and Congress to sign H.R. 1726 and S. 1174 to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment, known as the “Borinqueneers.”

I am here in two capacities. The first is an American Soldier, the son of an American Soldier, and the father of three American Soldiers. Three generations of my family have devoted thus far 120 years of Service to the United States of America. My father, my sons, and I have 11 combat tours between us in Korea, Vietnam, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. We have earned two Defense Superior Service Medals, four Bronze Stars Medals, including one for Valor, and a Purple Heart. For the previous 11 years in a row either one of my sons or I have been in a combat zone.

My father, Jesus Maria Villahermosa, began this pattern in 1950 when he joined the U.S. Army from Puerto Rico at the age of 18 and fought with the Army's 65th Infantry Regiment in Korea from the summer of 1951 to the summer of 1952. Afterward he instilled in his family a sense of Pride in this Great Country and Service to it. In my thirty-three years as an American Soldier I have served as an Armor and Airborne officer, an Intelligence Analyst, a U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer (Russia and Eurasia), U.S. Army Strategist, and U.S. Army Historian. I have served with Soldiers from the platoon level all the way to the Army level and have experienced war firsthand in the Georgian Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Yemen. I was in Washington D.C. when the Pentagon was hit on 9-11. And I was in our Embassy in Yemen when Al-Qaeda hit it in 2008. I believe my experiences in the U.S. Army as an American and a Puerto Rican officer provided me with unique into the challenges faced by the "Borinqueneers" in Korea.

My second capacity is as the U.S. Army's official historian of the 65th Infantry Regiment in the Korean War. In 1999 I was asked to come to the U.S. Army Center of Military History to fast track a major study on the Army's all Puerto Rican regiment in the Korean War by the then-Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera. At the time I had begun work on my own book on the "Borinqueneers" in Korea. I was asked to put together a special study outlining the history of the regiment in Korea and devoted most of that year to research in the National Archives at College Park, Maryland and Puerto Rico's General Archives in San Juan.

At the end of that year I completed the study and was asked, again by the then-Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera, to expand it into a full length book. I spent the following two years conducting additional research and interviewing veterans of the regiment in the Korean War. The statements and opinions I offer here today are based first and foremost on that research and those interviews.

In the United States Army we have a very simple formula for presentations – “Tell em what you’re going to tell em; Tell em! And tell em what you told em!” So let me begin by stating my Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF): **The United States Army’s 65th Infantry Regiment is more than worthy of being awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for its Service and Sacrifice to this Country for three reasons:**

First, the 65th Infantry Regiment fought brilliantly in Korea despite problems later in the war.

Second, Puerto Ricans from the island served as more than twice the rate of Continental Americans in the United States Army and Korea and suffered twice the casualties. This, despite the fact that the men of the regiment were subject to discrimination from Continental Officers and Soldiers, and later in the war, even from their own officers.

Third, despite the fact that the 65th Infantry Regiment arrived in Korea before either the 7th or 15th Infantry Regiments of the 3rd Infantry Division, with which it served, the 65th Infantry Regiment and its Soldiers to this day remain grossly underrepresented in terms of awards – Medals of Honors, Distinguished Services Crosses, Silver Stars and Bronze

Stars. In fact, the President of the United States awarded the first Congressional Medal of Honor to a Korean War veteran of the 65th Infantry Regiment, Master Sergeant Juan E. Negron, in March of this year.

It is time to recognize the valor of the men of the 65th Infantry Regiment who fought not one but two enemies simultaneously during four brutal years in Korea – the North Korean and Chinese Armies on one hand; and discrimination on the other!

It is time to correct the record with regard to the United States Army Puerto Rican Regiment. Our World War II and Korean War veterans are dying at the rate of 1,500 a day. I thank God every day that my father, a veteran of the 65th Infantry in Korea and the U.S. Army in Vietnam is still with us. But I wonder for how many more years that will be so. We no longer have the luxury of endless debates. We must act and ensure that Justice is done, that Service and Sacrifice are Recognized, that these men from America's "Forgotten War" know that as long as there is a United States of America, they will be Honored and Remembered!

It is time to award the "Borinqueneers" of the 65th Infantry Regiment the Congressional Gold Medal for their many, many years of Service and Sacrifice to this Great Country.

The 65th Infantry in the Korean War – A Synopsis

The first body of Puerto Rican troops formed for U.S. military service was the Puerto Rican Battalion of Volunteer Infantry authorized by Congress on 2 March 1899. A second battalion was added in February 1900 and the two battalions were combined to form the Puerto Rico Regiment of U.S. Volunteers. All officers and First Sergeants were Continental (white) Americans, a standard practice in an Army with little confidence in people of color. In March 1900, the regiment was redesignated the Puerto Rico Regiment, U.S. Volunteer Infantry. Shortly thereafter, the Army reorganized the force once again, renaming it the Puerto Rico Provisional Regiment of Infantry. The new unit consisted of two battalions, one mounted, one dismounted. On 1 July 1908 the Army renamed the unit the Puerto Rico Regiment of Infantry, United States Army. Note that it became part of the Regular Army on 27 May 1908. On 1 July 1916 in anticipation of American entry into World War I, the War Department authorized a third battalion. On 14 September the Puerto Rico Regiment of Infantry became the 65th Infantry Regiment. The formation was created as a segregated unit made up of Puerto Rican Soldiers and Sergeants with most of the officers being Continentals.

More than 236,000 Puerto Ricans registered for military service in World War I but only 18,000 were called to the colors. In addition, Puerto Rico provided the U.S. Army with 706 Infantry officers. Almost 350,000 Puerto Ricans registered for military service in World War II and more than 65,000 Puerto Ricans served in the U.S. armed forces, including 171 women. The vast majority served in Puerto Rico, the Panama Canal

Zone, and throughout the Caribbean guarding vital installations. The 65th Infantry, which deployed to Europe, was awarded battle participation credits for the Naples-Foggia, Rome-Arno, Central Europe, and Rhineland Campaigns.

It was the Puerto Rican 65th Infantry Regiment's success during the Puerto Rican Exercises (PORTREX) of 1950 that would later prompt the U.S. Army to send the "Borinqueneers" to Korea. Taking place on the island of Vieques, only four miles from Puerto Rico, PORTREX pitted Colonel William Harris and his Puerto Rican 65th Infantry Regiment, against elements of the 3rd Infantry and 82nd Airborne Divisions. The mission of the 65th Infantry, the "Aggressor" force, was to defend Vieques against a "Liberating" force. PORTREX thus pitted two of the U.S. Army's most famous divisions against relatively unknown Puerto Rican troops. The men of the 65th Infantry, however, were determined to "fight like Hell" rather than be driven off the island.

In December 1949, the men of the 65th moved to Vieques to prepare their defenses. Harris and his commanders conducted a reconnaissance of the island and then planned the placement of heavy weapons and command posts. In the meantime, the men of the regiment trained attacking and defending. In all, the Puerto Rican soldiers spent 70,000 man-days digging defensive positions, constructing underground command posts, and emplacing obstacles. "Their camouflage was excellent," observed one reporter, and "their fields of fire were well arranged."

Early on the morning of 8 March, D-Day, the first of over 20,000 Navy shells began impacting on Vieques. The Air Force then unleashed a continuous string of bombs that shook the regimental command post, and almost 5,000 combat troops of the 3rd Infantry Division began their assault on the beaches. The Puerto Ricans responded with heavy mortar and artillery barrages, which, in conjunction with the beach obstacles, stopped the landing force, inflicting 40 percent casualties on the attackers. "The umpires told me...our beach defenses are the best that they have ever seen – even better than what the Japanese threw at them in the Pacific," reported one battalion commander to Harris. The umpires called a halt and directed men of the 65th to clear lanes through the beach obstacles so that the attacking troops could come ashore. The landing forces then continued their landings.

The 3rd Infantry Division spent the first night reorganizing and building up its forces for a morning assault. The attack came at dawn and within hours Lieutenant Colonel Dammer called to inform Harris that his 2nd Battalion was under heavy pressure. At about the same time, the sound of low-flying C-119 Flying Boxcars alerted the Puerto Ricans that elements of the 82nd Airborne Division were headed their way. Harris responded by putting the regiment's counterattack plan into motion. Anti-aircraft fire inflicted heavy losses on the paratroopers even before they hit the ground. When they landed, they were met with withering mortar and artillery fire, which decimated their ranks. The 65th Infantry's reserve battalion then entered the battle, inflicting heavy losses on the men of the 82nd Airborne. The remaining paratroopers, however,

penetrated the regiment's position, driving it from the high ground controlling the beaches.

By the morning of D+2, the 3rd Infantry Division attack had ground to a halt with the 65th Infantry holding its ground against tremendous pressure. Later that day, the senior commanders of the Liberating forces were "killed" when they accepted a booby-trapped "gift" from a Puerto Rican soldier disguised as a grateful hibaro. Harris took advantage of the confusion that followed by launching a skillful infantry and armor counterattack preceded by smoke and an intense artillery barrage. The Puerto Ricans quickly fought their way to the beachhead. The Liberating Forces responded with forty-two on-call aircraft, inflicting heavy losses on the men of the 65th. Further assaults by the 3rd Infantry Division now forced the Puerto Ricans back, and by the morning of D+5 the Liberating Forces had driven the regiment to its last positions on the far side of the island. There were still two days to go and the men of the 65th were determined to hold out.

The morning of D+6 opened with a roar as the Navy and Air Force began their pre-attack bombardment. The 3rd Infantry Division's final drive against Harris and his men was only beginning when the 65th responded with another counterattack by a force of truck drivers, cooks, and support personnel supported by tanks and artillery. Before the attack could gain momentum, however, the umpires declared the exercise over. The Puerto Ricans had held their ground!

PORTREX ended on the morning of March 12, 1950, the largest amphibious and airborne maneuvers in United States peacetime history. The Puerto Rican soldiers received numerous accolades for their tenacity and the 65th Infantry was complimented on its defensive positions, which one Army general called "the most extensive and most realistic...ever undertaken by American troops in a training exercise." Another senior observer called the regiment's counterattacks "brilliantly executed." As a result, the regiment and its Puerto Rican troops received a great deal of positive exposure, impressing senior U.S. civilian and military leaders. More importantly, the 65th Infantry would go to war in less than six months as one of the United States Army's largest and best-trained infantry formations. Ironically, the regiment's Puerto Rican soldiers would fight in Korea, for four long years, as part of the 3rd Infantry Division, the unit they had bested in PORTREX.

The 65th Infantry Regiment arrived in Korea on 23 September 1950 with more than 3,900 men in its ranks. Spirits were high. Major General Edward Almond's X Corps had landed at Inchon, while Lieutenant General Walton Walker's Eighth Army had broken out of the Pusan Perimeter the previous week. The regiment's first mission took place on 28 September, when it seized a hill defended by a strong enemy force at a cost of six men. Responding to a query from Puerto Rico on the state and performance of the 65th Infantry in Korea, General Douglas MacArthur, the United Nations Commander, observed that the unit's men were "showing magnificent ability and courage in field

operations. They are a credit to Puerto Rico and I am proud to have them in my command."

On 4 November the 65th moved to Pusan and then to Wonsan, North Korea by ship, arriving there as the lead element of the 3rd Infantry Division. At the end of November, Chinese forces attacked U.S. troops in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, and the 65th played a critical role in assisting Task Force Dog with covering the withdrawal of the 1st Marine Division. The 65th's Task Force Childs held the high ground that the Marines had to pass through against sustained Chinese attacks. Soon afterward, the 65th was again tasked with holding a key objective: a sector of the Hungnam beachhead, the exit point through which all X Corps forces were evacuated from northeastern Korea. The 65th Infantry's 2nd Battalion was the last unit to come off the beach when the evacuation was completed on 24 December, 1950. The X Corps and 3rd Infantry Division commanders commended the regiment for its outstanding performance.

In January 1951 the 65th Infantry participated in Operations Thunderbolt and Exploitation. By the end of the month, the regiment had advanced to just south of Seoul, where it was ordered to seize three hills held by the Chinese 149th Division. On the morning of 2 February 1951, two Puerto Rican battalions fixed bayonets and charged, forcing the Chinese soldiers to flee. The regiment's performance prompted General MacArthur to write: "The Puerto Ricans forming the ranks of the gallant 65th Infantry give daily proof on the battlefields of Korea of their courage, determination, and

resolute will to victory... They are writing a brilliant record of heroism in battle and I am indeed proud to have them under my command.”

In February and March, the 65th participated in Operations Killer and Ripper, aimed at the destruction of Communist forces. Patrols of the 65th were among the first U.S. troops to reenter the South Korean capital. In March, the 65th destroyed an entire North Korean regiment that had slipped through the front lines and attacked the 3rd Infantry Division's rear. In April the 65th participated in Operation Dauntless, leading the 3rd Infantry Division's attack and defeating elements of the Chinese 26th Army. On 19 April, Sergeant Modesto Cartagena and Corporal Nieves-Laguer, both of Company C, won the Distinguished Service Cross during attacks on Chinese defensive positions near Yonchon. Sergeant Cartagena knocked out five strongpoints with hand grenades until seriously wounded. Corporal Nieves-Laguer repeatedly charged Communist dugouts, killing the defenders and freeing the remainder of his squad to advance. Nieves-Laguer also made three separate trips across fire-swept terrain, evacuating three badly wounded comrades to safety.

The 65th defended its sector tenaciously during the Communist Spring offensive of May 1951, punishing the Chinese with blistering air and artillery strikes and forcing them to break off their attacks. The regiment held its ground resolutely until ordered to break contact, then withdrew in an organized fashion. Finally, it was the unit selected to lead the relief of the beleaguered British Gloster Battalion, reflecting General Soule's

confidence in the fighting abilities of his Puerto Rican soldiers. "At division it was considered to be a most dependable force," remembers Lieutenant Colonel Bill Friedman, the 3rd Infantry Division's Assistant Operations Officer. "Their withdrawal was orderly and controlled and the resistance it offered was still first class."

When asked by officers of the 65th why the regiment had spent so much time on the front lines, Brigadier General Armistead D. Mead, the Assistant Division Commander of the 3rd Infantry Division, replied that the 65th was the strongest regiment in the division. It had arrived in Korea overstrength at a time when the other regiments were understrength. In addition, the 65th had arrived two months before the remainder of the division and thus had more combat experience than the other infantry regiments. Finally, Mead said that the Puerto Ricans tended to occupy the best and most defensible terrain.

By the Spring of 1951, the 65th Infantry had established a reputation as a well-led, well-trained, and highly motivated unit. "Its performance was superb," recalled a Puerto Rican officer in the 1st Battalion, Captain Fernandez-Duran. "We were very proud of our regiment's action. There was never any fear or cowardice displayed by anyone in our unit. Leadership was superb and most of the soldiers were veterans and regular army. As to discipline, nothing was left to be desired."

Between September 1950 and the Spring of 1951, the Puerto Rican 65th Infantry Regiment had established a reputation as one of the 3rd Infantry Division's best and most dependable formations. It was well led, well trained, and highly motivated. The quality of the regiment in combat, however, began to deteriorate rapidly through the Fall of 1952, when major failures occurred at Outpost Kelly and Jackson Heights in the Chorwon Valley of North Korea. By then the Chinese had completed a major quantitative and qualitative buildup and were becoming increasingly aggressive in the contest for control of the high ground forward of Eighth Army's main defensive line. Intent upon gaining a better position prior to the onset of winter and concerned with gaining leverage in the peace talks through victories on the battlefield, the Communists made the western and central sectors of the UN Command's main line of resistance the focus of fierce and bitter fighting.

On the night of 18 September two reinforced Chinese infantry companies slammed into Outpost Kelly from three directions, overwhelming the Puerto Rican defenders of Company B and quickly seizing their positions. The regimental commander, Colonel Cordero-Davila, the only Puerto Rican to command a regular Army regiment in the Korean War, was reluctant to call in artillery fires or to commit the regimental reserve battalion lest they kill those of his own soldiers still remaining on the hill. He was also concerned that the relief force might come under friendly fire in the confusion. Two nights later, the 65th launched a battalion against the outpost in an attempt to regain it. The unit came under extremely heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire from the very beginning of its assault, followed by a Chinese counterattack, which threw back the

Puerto Ricans, ending the attempt to retake the position. On 24 September the regiment launched a second counterattack. It too failed. By the end of the month, Outpost Kelly remained in enemy Chinese hands. The regiment suffered 408 battle casualties during the month, the highest in any engagement since its arrival in Korea two years earlier.

During October, Chinese forces launched another series of strong local attacks, including one on Jackson Heights, located on the eastern edge of the Chorwon Valley. A mountain of solid rock located more than a mile forward of the front line positions, the heights were defended by a company of the 65th Infantry. On the night of 25 October two Chinese companies slammed into the Puerto Rican positions, again overpowering the defenders and quickly seizing the heights. Two counterattacks by soldiers of the regiment failed to regain it. By the end of the month the 65th had suffered another 259 casualties.

Altogether, the 65th suffered over 800 casualties (including 500 battle casualties and 306 non-battle casualties) defending and attempting to retake Outpost Kelly and Jackson Heights. The reputation of the regiment and its Puerto Rican soldiers, which had suffered a heavy blow after the battle of Outpost Kelly, was shattered irreparably after Jackson Heights. A total of 123 Puerto Rican soldiers, including one officer, were ordered court-martialed for refusing to attack the enemy as ordered and misbehavior before the enemy.

A number of factors influenced the failure of the 65th in the Fall of 1952, many of them related to conditions prevalent within Eighth Army and the 3rd Infantry Division. At the army level, these included a shortage of officers and NCOs, a rotation policy that gutted units of combat-experienced leaders and soldiers and made sustained training impossible, tactical doctrine that resulted in high casualties, an artillery ammunition shortage, and declining morale. At the division level, they included poor leadership, a weak artillery brigade, and a command environment guilty of ethnic and organizational prejudice. Factors within the 65th contributed as well. They included a catastrophic shortage of NCOs, language problems, and inept leadership.

That Chinese forces were by then at their best only made matters worse. By October 1952 the Chinese and North Koreans enjoyed a rough parity in artillery with United National force at the front, while having the advantage of ample reserves. Furthermore, the Communists also displayed a growing tactical competence and a greater willingness to take the war to the enemy. Unlike the U.S. Army in Korea, few Chinese officers and soldiers rotated home, ensuring a large cadre of battle-hardened veterans. The capture of Outpost Kelly and Jackson Heights can be considered model operations by reinforced Chinese battalions and highlights the disparity in leadership, training, and morale of the two opposing forces.

In the end, the heavy cumulative effect of all these influences was simply too great a burden for the 65th to bear. The regiment, which suffered from these problems at least

as much, if not more, than any other U.S. infantry regiment in Korea, simply could not overcome the combination of all these factors. It is a tribute to the dedication and perseverance of the men of the 65th that, in light of all this, they attacked as many times as they did and were able to advance as far as they did. As happens too often in war, they were let down by their leaders at all levels.

Between December 1952 and January 1953, one hundred and four soldiers of the 65th Infantry were charged with offenses committed following the battle of Jackson Heights on 28 and 29 October and 3 November 1952. The charges ranged from desertion to avoid hazardous duty, to willfully disobeying the lawful orders of a superior officer, and misbehavior before the enemy. Ninety-six, including one officer, were court-martialed in fifteen common trials. Of these, four were acquitted, while eight had had the charges against them thrown out.

The majority of the soldiers court-martialed were privates and privates first class. Only two were corporals. Most were 22 to 23 years old, with the youngest being 19 and the oldest being 31. The preponderance had nine or ten years of education, although a significant proportion had twelve years, with several having completed one or two years of college. The greater part had tested "Inferior" (Class IV) or "Very Inferior" (Class V) on the post-induction intelligence test, the Army General Classification Test. Only one soldier tested "Average" (Class III), with none scoring "Very Superior" (Class I) or "Superior" (Class II). However, lack of fluency in English may have resulted in low

scores for the Hispanic soldiers. Most of the men court-martialed were draftees. A handful were from the Puerto Rican National Guard. About half had a character of service of "Excellent." The others had been rated as either "Good" or "Satisfactory." Only one had previously been court-martialed. Finally, the vast majority had served about a year in the Army, although one was a World War II veteran, during which he was decorated with two Bronze Star medals and a Purple Heart.

By late January 1953 newspapers in the United States and Puerto Rico had begun running stories announcing the court-martials of the men of the 65th Infantry, mostly as the result of letters written by the Puerto Rican soldiers to their friends and families back home. The Army had tried to keep the court-martials quiet, downplaying both the number of men tried and the severity of their sentences. On 25 January, for example, *The New York Times* ran an article stating that, according to Army sources, one officer and 87 men had been tried and received sentences ranging from six months to ten years confinement at hard labor. According to Army officials quoted in the article, only a single individual received a ten-year term. In a second article, published the following day, however, 3rd Infantry Division officers were quoted as saying that 92 soldiers of the regiment, not 88 as had been initially reported, had been court-martialed and that the convicted men had received sentences of six to ten years confinement and dishonorable discharges. And on 27 January, *The New York Times* ran a third article stating that the Governor of Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican press had asked the Army for an official inquiry into events at Jackson Heights and the court-martials of the Puerto Rican soldiers.

As a result of the storm of publicity the case received, Congress, the government of Puerto Rico, and the press demanded an explanation and investigation. On 3 February 1953, General J. Lawton Collins, the Army Chief of Staff, testified before the House Armed Services Committee. When asked about the 65th Infantry Regiment and the courts-martial, Collins answered that the 65th had been "a very well trained" and "very ably led unit" when it first arrived in Korea, "where it distinguished itself in action." He blamed the failure of the regiment on rotation, the inability of the men to speak English, and the lack of battlefield experience of its officers. "The Puerto Ricans have proven in action in earlier fighting in Korea that they are gallant people and that they will fight just as well as anyone else if they are properly trained and properly led," he said. The Army Chief of Staff concluded his testimony on the 65th Infantry by pointing out that its failures were not due to either a lack of artillery or equipment, as some members of Congress had alleged.

The inability of the men of the 65th to speak English became the Army's official reason for the failure of the regiment at Jackson Heights. With Congressional and public pressure growing to do something about the Hispanic soldiers serving their time in various disciplinary barracks, Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens, who had earlier approved the sentences handed out to the men of the regiment, now moved quickly to overturn them. By 14 July he had granted clemency to 53 of the regiment's soldiers. By 1954 all the sentences had been remitted.

The last Puerto Rican soldier pardoned was Lieutenant Juan E. Guzman, the first individual and only officer to have been court-martialed. The majority of the Puerto Rican soldiers court-martialed returned to serve the U.S. Army in Panama and Puerto Rico. The stigma of the court-martials, however, followed many for the rest of their lives. Many never told their friends or families, who remain unaware to this day, of their tribulations. To this day, many remain reluctant to revisit the regiment's darkest hour in Korea.

The 65th Infantry Regiment was hardly the first American unit in Korea to suffer such serious setbacks and disciplinary problems. The 34th Infantry was reduced to paper status in August 1950, while the African-American 24th Infantry Regiment was inactivated on 1 October 1951. Both regiments had suffered repeated combat failures. In August 1951 a battalion of the 9th Infantry Regiment became disorganized and abandoned its positions during the fighting for Bloody Ridge after its command groups was surprised by the Chinese and fled. In July 1952, 85 men of the 23rd Infantry and another 15 men of the 2nd Infantry Division abandoned their positions at Old Baldy and refused to return to the fighting. The men were not punished. Nor was the 65th Infantry the last. In November 1952, a 15th Infantry Regiment patrol refused to continue with its mission. A week later the 15th Infantry Regiment lost Jackson Heights and failed to retake it.

The 65th Infantry Regiment became a fully integrated formation in 1953. It was the last U.S. Army infantry regiment to be integrated. In 1954, upon its return to Puerto Rico, it was transferred from the Regular Army to the Puerto Rico National Guard. Members of the regiment were sent abroad following 9-11 to secure U.S. military facilities in Europe and later served in Afghanistan and Djibouti in the War on Terror. A new generation of "Borinqueneers" continues to serve the United States proudly following in the footsteps of their forefathers. Currently more than 10,000 Puerto Ricans and a 157,000 Hispanics are serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Statistics on Puerto Rican Soldiers in the Korean War

Continental U.S. Population (1950 Census)	151,132,000
Total U.S. Military Serving in Korea	1,798,000 (1.2% of US pop.)
Total Battle Deaths	33,686
Total Wounded (Not Mortal)	103,284
Total Battle Casualties	136,970 (7.6% of U.S. Troops in Korea, .09% of U.S. population)
Total Puerto Rican Population	2,219,703 (1.5% of U.S. pop.)
Total Insular Puerto Ricans Serving in Korea	48,000 (2.7 % of all personnel in Korea; 2.2 % of Puerto Rico's population)
Continental Puerto Ricans Serving in Korea	13,000
Total Battle Deaths	750 (2.2% of all Battle Deaths)
Total Wounded	2,400 (2.3% of all wounded)
Total Battle Casualties	3,150 (2.3% of all Battle Casualties, 6.5% of all Insular Puerto Rican Troops 5.2 % of all Puerto Rican Troops in Korea, .14 % of Puerto Rico's population)

Medals and Recognition

Medals are an important part of a Soldier's and an Army's life and history. They recognize Service and Sacrifice and are awarded for Valor or other exemplary contributions to mission success. Medals tell us a great deal about an individual and the unit and his regiment.

While working in the National Archives at College Park, Maryland I discovered a very disturbing trend after going through every awards packet for the U.S. Eighth Army during the Korean War. The 65th Infantry Regiment is grossly underrepresented with regards to awards for valor, despite the fact that the "Borinqueneers" arrived in Korea before either of its sister regiments in the 3rd Infantry Division - the 7th or 15th Infantry Regiments - and spent more times on the front lines. Note that for Silver Stars awarded between 1950 and 1953, the men of the 7th Infantry were awarded 360; the 15th Infantry 348; and the 65th Infantry 156. For Bronze Stars, the men of the 7th Infantry were awarded some 768; the 15th Infantry 447; and the 65th Infantry some 421. Thus in terms of total awards, the 15th Infantry earned 1,128; the 15th Infantry 795; and the 65th Infantry only 557. The men of the 65th Infantry were also awarded considerably fewer Distinguished Service Crosses than the men of the other two regiments and no Congressional Medals of Honor, despite awards citations that clearly supported that prestigious recognition.

Are we to believe from these awards statistics that the Puerto Rican Soldiers of the 65th Infantry were less brave than their Continental counterparts? Or are there other explanations?

My research into Eight Army awards indicate that officers tended to win approximately a third of the awards in any infantry regiment, with the remaining two thirds going to the Soldiers. This is true for both the 7th and 15th Infantry Regiments. It is not true, however, for the 65th Infantry Regiment. The Continental officers in the 65th Infantry Regiment awarded themselves more than half of the Silver Stars and Bronze Stars given to the regiment. And almost half of the regiment's Distinguished Service Crosses went to officers. Strike One!

Furthermore, I noticed that the 65th Infantry received practically no awards for the several critical months it was attached to the 2nd Infantry Division and the 25th Infantry Division after its arrival in Korea in September 1950. This was despite the fact that the 65th Infantry saw a great deal of action during this period. How is this possible? The regiment was used to bolster both understrength regiments for their combat operations as they started attacking northward from the Pusan Perimeter. The reason is that normally, a division is assigned only so many awards – so many Silver Stars and so many Bronze Stars – to award to its Soldiers. The men of the 65th Infantry were outsiders. They weren't part of either the 2nd Infantry Division or the 25th Infantry Division just as they were never really part of the 3rd Infantry Division. The commanders

of those divisions and their regiments made sure that their allocation of awards went to their own men not to the Puerto Rican soldiers of the 65th Infantry Regiment. Strike Two!

Finally, I was stunned to find award citations in 1950 written by Colonel William Harris, the 65th Infantry Commander, and his officers recommending their Soldiers for a lower level of awards than was common among the other regiments. In his own history of the 65th Infantry in Korea "From Pusan to Chorwon" Colonel Harris admits making a mistake and awarding Soldiers Medals to "Borinqueneers" that deserved Bronze Stars and Silver Stars. He attributes his error to inexperience. Harris, who had served as a staff officer in World War II and was given command of the regiment as a reward for his service, had never commanded men in combat. By that time his book was written, however, it was too late to correct the record. And neither Harris nor anyone else ever really tried. Strike Three!

The result? The Puerto Rican Soldiers of the 65th Infantry Regiment were never properly recognized for their Valor and their Sacrifice. Their combat contributions to our successes in Korea were denigrated and demeaned. Yet they continued to serve, Faithfully and Courageously, giving their blood for a country that wouldn't even allow them to vote in Presidential elections.

Conclusion

I've now told you what I was gonna tell you. Now I'm going to end by telling you what I told you!

The United States Army's 65th Infantry Regiment is more than worthy of being awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for its Service and Sacrifice to this Country for three reasons:

First, the 65th Infantry Regiment fought brilliantly in Korea despite problems later in the war.

Second, Puerto Ricans from the island served as more than twice the rate of Continental Americans in the United States Army and Korea and suffered twice the casualties. This, despite the fact that the men of the regiment were subject to discrimination from Continental Officers and Soldiers, and later in the war, even from their own officers.

Third, despite the fact that the 65th Infantry Regiment arrived in Korea before either the 7th or 15th Infantry Regiments of the 3rd Infantry Division, with which it served, the 65th Infantry Regiment and its Soldiers to this day remain grossly underrepresented in terms of awards – Medals of Honors, Distinguished Services Crosses, Silver Stars and Bronze Stars.

I hope that each and every one of you does everything in his or her power to ensure passage of these two very important resolutions.

I thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. I want you to know that I am always available to the members of this Committee and the New York City Council to answer any of your questions on the 65th Infantry Regiment "Borinqueneers".

Sources

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Distinguished Service Crosses 65th Infantry Regiment in Korea

CARTAGENA, MODESTO

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Modesto Cartagena (RA10404100), Sergeant, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with Company C, 1st Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. Sergeant Cartagena distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the vicinity of Yonch'on, Korea, on 19 April 1951. On that date, Company C was assigned the mission of capturing Hill 206, a terrain feature dominating a critical road junction. When the company assaulted the summit, it encountered stubborn resistance from a well-entrenched and fanatically determined hostile force. Sergeant Cartagena, directed to move his squad forward in order to approach the enemy positions from another ridgeline, led his men toward the objective, but, almost immediately, the group was forced to seek cover from an intense and accurate volume of small-arms and automatic-weapons fire. Locating the hostile emplacements that posed the greatest obstacle to the advance of the friendly forces, Sergeant Cartagena left his position and, charging directly into the devastating enemy fire he hurled a grenade at the first emplacement, totally destroying it. Ordering his squad to remain under cover, he successfully and single-handedly assaulted the second enemy position. Although knocked to the ground by exploding enemy grenades, Sergeant Cartagena repeated this daring action three more times. Finally, an increased volume of fire from the remaining hostile emplacements was concentrated on him and he was wounded. The extraordinary heroism and completely selfless devotion, to duty displayed by Sergeant Cartagena throughout this action enabled the company to secure its objective successfully with a minimum of casualties, reflect great credit on himself and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 698 (September 16, 1951)
Home Town: , Puerto Rico

CAVAZOS, RICHARD E.
(First Award)

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Richard E. Cavazos (O-64593), First Lieutenant (Infantry), U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while as Company Commander of Company E, 2d Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. First Lieutenant Cavazos distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the vicinity of Sagimak, Korea, on the night of 14 June 1953. On that date, Lieutenant Cavazos led his men in a raid on the entrenched enemy upon whom heavy casualties were inflicted. When a heavy barrage was laid on the position by the enemy, Lieutenant Cavazos withdrew the company and regrouped his men. Lieutenant Cavazos three times led the company through the heavy barrage in assaults on the enemy position, each time destroying vital enemy equipment and personnel. When the United Nations element was ordered to withdraw, Lieutenant Cavazos remained alone on the enemy outpost to search the area for missing men. Exposed to heavy hostile fire, Lieutenant Cavazos located five men who had been wounded in the action. He evacuated them, one at a time, to a point on the reverse slope of the hill from which they could be removed to the safety of the friendly lines. Lieutenant Cavazos then made two more trips between the United Nations position and the enemy-held hill searching for casualties and evacuating scattered groups of men who had become confused. Not until he was assured that the hill was cleared did he allow treatment of his own wounds sustained during the action.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 832 (September 10, 1953)
Other Award: Distinguished Service Cross w/OLC (Vietnam)

CHAMBERLAIN, SMITH B.

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Smith B. Chamberlain (O-027587), First Lieutenant (Infantry), U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. First Lieutenant Chamberlain distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the Republic of Korea on 3 June 1951. On that date, Lieutenant Chamberlain, a platoon leader, was ordered to make the initial crossing of a river and to lead his men in an attack on the first objective in an allied assault to capture a vital, enemy-held position. While Lieutenant Chamberlain was organizing his men for the crossing, the platoon was subjected to heavy enemy fire. Ordering his men to take cover, Lieutenant Chamberlain waded the river to check it for depth and swiftness and then swam back and re-crossed with a rope to be used as a guide line. While the platoon was moving across the river, one of the men lost his footing and the swift current carried him downstream toward the swirling rapids. Lieutenant Chamberlain rescued this man and three others in similar mishaps and sustained rib injuries when he was hurled against rocks and boulders in the water. Once the men had crossed the river, Lieutenant Chamberlain reorganized them and, after a valiant three-hour struggle, succeeded in securing the first objective. When the platoon was relieved, Lieutenant Chamberlain went to the battalion aid station for treatment of his side injury and grenade wounds which he suffered during the fighting. Upon return, he found that a bridge which had been constructed across the river had been knocked out by an enemy counter-attack and the Allied elements had withdrawn to the-opposite bank. Again swimming the river, though suffering from a possible rib fracture and subjected to heavy machine-gun fire, Lieutenant Chamberlain repeatedly tried to establish a guide line, but heavy rains had swollen the river until it was impossible to successfully navigate it with the rope. Refusing to be stopped, Lieutenant Chamberlain made continuous trips back and forth with an inflated air mattress carrying wounded men and equipment and rescuing men who had become marooned on the rocks when they attempted to swim. The following morning, Lieutenant Chamberlain was successful in establishing a guide line across the river. He then organized a thirty-man patrol and led them in the recovery of the ground lost the previous day.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 684 (July 23, 1953)

***DANKOWSKI, STANLEY RAYMOND (MIA)**

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Stanley Raymond Dankowski (O-1925162), First Lieutenant (Infantry), U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with Company K, 3d Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. First Lieutenant Dankowski distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces near Honu-Chon, Korea, on 6 July 1953. Early on the morning of 6 July 1953, Lieutenant Dankowski was leading an assault platoon participating in an attack on an enemy-held hill. As the platoon began its advance up the second slope of the hill, it was subjected to a heavy concentration of fire from enemy automatic rifles. Lieutenant Dankowski moved up and down the skirmish line, encouraging his men, urging them forward, and instilling them with an aggressive spirit that carried them successfully through this phase of the attack. Mid-way up the third and final slope of the hill, the platoon was again met by a barrage from enemy machine guns and supporting automatic rifles. Ordering his men to cover his advance, Lieutenant Dankowski without regard to his personal peril, moved directly into the enemy fire, climbed to the roof of a large bunker from which fire was coming and hurled hand grenades into the aperture. His courageous action neutralized the position and enabled his men to advance. When last seen, Lieutenant Dankowski had been critically wounded by artillery fire while firing on other enemy positions with his carbine. The extraordinary heroism exhibited by Lieutenant Dankowski on this occasion reflects great credit on himself and is in keeping with the finest traditions of the military service.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 830 (September 9, 1953)
Home Town: Essex, New Jersey

DOOLEY, JAMES W.

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to James W. Dooley, Sergeant, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. Sergeant Dooley distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the vicinity of Sagimak, Korea, on 9 June 1953. On that date, Sergeant Dooley was a member of an assault party which closed in hand-to-hand combat with a hostile force defending a strategic hill. During the action, Sergeant Dooley continually exposed himself to heavy fire at the entrances to caves sheltering enemy troops to hurl grenades which inflicted numerous casualties and neutralized enemy fire. When six hostile soldiers charged from their bunker into the United Nations ranks, Sergeant Dooley exposed himself and killed all members of the group with automatic rifle fire. Informed that a comrade had been wounded on the upper slope of the hill, Sergeant Dooley climbed the steep slope under the enemy barrage. As he arrived at the wounded man's side, an enemy grenade landed close to the wounded man. Disregarding all thoughts of personal safety, Sergeant Dooley threw himself on top of his wounded comrade to protect him from grenade fragments. In so doing, Sergeant Dooley sustained painful wounds on the arms and hands. Then, with the aid of covering fire from other members of the patrol, Sergeant Dooley, under direct enemy observation, carried the wounded man back down the hill to safety.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 767 (August 19, 1953)

DURKEE, RICHARD W.

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Richard W. Durkee (O-1325809), First Lieutenant (Infantry), U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with Company L, 3d Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. First Lieutenant Durkee distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the vicinity of Uijongbu, Korea, on 23 March 1951. On that date, while attacking well defended enemy positions on Hill 221, the 1st Platoon of Company L was subjected to intense small arms fire and pinned down. After ordering the remainder of the platoon to furnish covering fire, Lieutenant Durkee led the 1st squad in an assault on the enemy entrenchment's. When his ammunition was expended, Lieutenant Durkee single-handedly assaulted an enemy position and killed the occupant with his bayonet. Unable to remove his bayonet from the body of the dead soldier, he went unarmed to another hostile position, seized an enemy soldier's rifle by the bayonet, wrested the weapon from his hands and clubbed him to death. Although his hand was seriously lacerated during this action, Lieutenant Durkee continued to lead the assault against the enemy and his men, inspired by the fearlessness of their leader, overwhelmed the hostile troops and secured the objective. Lieutenant Durkee's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 522 (July 7, 1951)
Home Town: Washington, D.C.

***HANSEN, DARRELL J.**

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Darrell J. Hansen (O-1934922), Second Lieutenant (Infantry), U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with an Infantry Company of the 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. Second Lieutenant Hansen distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the vicinity of Kumhwa, Korea, on 16 July 1953. On that date, Lieutenant Hansen was the leader of a combat patrol which advanced on an enemy-held hill to contact and engage the enemy. Despite the intense bombardment throughout the area, Lieutenant Hansen led his group to the crest of the hill, disperse his men, and supervised the establishment of defensive positions. When the enemy assaulted the patrol from the rear, Lieutenant Hansen completely ignored the heavy barrage and moved openly throughout the sector to direct the effective fire of his men and to assist in the care of the wounded. As the attack increased in volume, Lieutenant Hansen ordered his group to withdraw and courageously remained behind to cover their movement with his carbine. With fearless disregard for his personal welfare, he inflicted numerous casualties on the enemy and personally repulsed the assault before he was mortally wounded by enemy fire. Through his self-sacrifice and devotion to duty, Lieutenant Hansen enabled his patrol to withdraw to the safety of rear positions with a minimum of casualties.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 1091, (December 20, 1953)

Home Town: Muscatine, Iowa

HERNANDEZ-GUZMAN, BADEL

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Badel Hernandez-Guzman, Private, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with Company I, 3d Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. Private Hernandez-Guzman distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the vicinity of Chorwon, Korea, on 1 October 1951. On that date, Private Hernandez-Guzman's company was assigned the mission of attacking a numerically superior hostile force occupying well fortified hill positions. In the opening phase of the attack, the assaulting elements were pinned down by a devastating volume of hostile automatic weapons fire. Realizing that his comrades faced annihilation in their present untenable positions, Private Hernandez-Guzman picked up a flame thrower and began to move forward. Upon locating the hostile emplacement which posed the greatest threat to his comrades, he unhesitatingly ran toward it. Crossing a wide expanse of open terrain, and completely exposed to the concentrated fire of the enemy, he made his way to within twenty yards of the machine gun position. The enemy, in desperation, converged the entire volume of their firepower on Private Hernandez-Guzman, hurling numerous grenades in an attempt to halt the single-handed assault. Undeterred by the intense hostile fire, Private Hernandez-Guzman charged the remaining twenty yards and destroyed the enemy strongpoint with the flame thrower. Through his courageous and selfless actions, the friendly force was able to renew its assault and overrun its objective. The extraordinary heroism and steadfast devotion to duty displayed by Private Hernandez-Guzman reflect the greatest credit on himself and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 3 (January 2, 1952)

NEGRON, JUAN E.

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Juan E. Negron (RA10406243), Master Sergeant, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with the 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. Master Sergeant Negron distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the vicinity of Kalma-Eri, Korea, on 28 April 1951. On that date, Sergeant Negron took up the most vulnerable position on his company's exposed right flank after an enemy force had overrun a section of the line. When notified that elements of the company were withdrawing, Sergeant Negron refused to leave his exposed position, but delivered withering fire at hostile troops who had broken through a road block. When the hostile troops approached his position, Sergeant Negron accurately hurled hand grenades at short range, halting their attack. Sergeant Negron held the position throughout the night, while an allied counter attack was organized and launched. After the enemy had been repulsed, fifteen enemy dead were found only a few feet from Sergeant Negron's position. The extraordinary heroism exhibited by Sergeant Negron on this occasion reflects great credit on himself and is in keeping with the finest traditions of the military service.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 588 (June 21, 1953)
Home Town: , Puerto Rico

NIEVES-LAGUER, FABIAN

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Fabian Nieves-Laguer (RA30419666), Corporal, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with Company C, 1st Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. Corporal Nieves-Laguer distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces Chwanchan-dong, Korea, on 19 April 1951. On that date, Corporal Nieves-Laguer's unit was given the mission of attacking and securing positions held by a well entrenched and fanatically determined enemy force. Moving forward under intense enemy mortar and small arms fire, Corporal Nieves-Laguer, an automatic rifleman, repeatedly charged enemy dug-outs, clearing them of opposition and enabling the remainder of his squad to advance without casualties. However the hostile fire finally became so intense that the advancing friendly elements were forced to withdraw to more tenable positions. As the enemy launched a powerful counterattack, Corporal Nieves-Laguer observed three wounded men lying directly in the path of the onrushing hostile forces. With utter disregard for his personal safety, he made three separate trips across the fire swept terrain to carry the stricken soldiers to safety. After successfully evacuating the injured men, Corporal Nieves-Laguer returned to his position and manned his weapon. From his emplacement he was able to furnish effective fire support to cover the withdrawal and subsequent reorganization of his unit. The outstanding devotion to duty and extraordinary heroism displayed by Corporal Nieves-Laguer in this action reflect great credit on himself and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 635 (August 12, 1951)

NORIEGA, BELISARIO

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Belisario Noriega, Master Sergeant, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. Master Sergeant Noriega distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the vicinity of the Chorwon, Korea, on 27 October 1952. On that date, Sergeant Noriega was with a company defending an outpost position which was subjected to a heavy barrage of artillery and mortar fire. When a fire started in the ammunition supply point, Sergeant Noriega, fully cognizant of the dangers involved, rushed to the scene and assisted in extinguishing the blaze. Upon his return to the defensive positions, Sergeant Noriega found that one of the platoon leaders was a casualty and his men had become confused and disorganized under the strain of the intense shelling. Sergeant Noriega immediately reorganized the men, deployed them in the most advantageous positions, assigned fields of fire and through the assault which followed Sergeant Noriega maintained command of the platoon and employed it effectively. When the company was ordered to withdraw after the position had been encircled, Sergeant Noriega led the men through the hostile ranks to the safety of the main line of resistance. The extraordinary heroism exhibited by Sergeant Noriega on this occasion reflects great credit on himself and is in keeping with the finest traditions of the military service.

Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 698 (July 27, 1953)

TOLBERT, JACK P.

Citation: The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Jack P. Tolbert (RA19296161), Sergeant First Class, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving with Company B, 1st Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division. Sergeant First Class Tolbert distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces near Kumhwa, Korea, on 11 June 1953. Sergeant Tolbert was one of two outpost guards on the main line of resistance when the area came under a heavy artillery and mortar bombardment. Observing a hostile infantryman approaching the position, he shouted a warning to the other sentinel and to the guard at the command post, enabling them to alert other elements of the imminent attack. Seconds later the enemy soldier hurled a fragmentation grenade into the bunker. Fully aware of the danger involved, he stepped on the missile in an attempt to dispose of it or lessen its explosive effect and receive the full impact of the explosion. Although critically wounded in this display of valor, his prompt and unhesitating action prevented serious injury to his comrade. Inspired by his unflinching courage, the troops fought with great tenacity and skill, inflicting numerous casualties and containing the assault. Sergeant Tolbert's inspirational conduct and consummate devotion to duty reflect the highest credit upon himself and uphold the esteemed traditions of the military service.

Department of the Army: General Orders No. 26 (April 2, 1954)
Home Town: Los Angeles, California

Gilberto Villahermosa

Colonel, U.S. Army (Retired)

65th Infantry Regiment Historian



Colonel U.S. Army (Retired) Gilberto Villahermosa is the U.S. Army's official historian of the Puerto Rican 65th Infantry Regiment in Korea. He was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico and grew up in the Panama Canal Zone and Washington State. He graduated from Lakes High School in Steilacoom, Washington before entering the United States Military Academy at West Point. Upon graduation he was commissioned a second lieutenant and served in the U.S. Army as an Armor Officer, Master Paratrooper, Foreign Area Specialist (Russia and Eurasia), Army Strategist, and Army Historian. He retired in May 2013 after thirty-three years of service.

Colonel (Ret.) Villahermosa is a Published Author and experienced Public Speaker. While assigned to the U.S. Army's Center of Military History at Fort McNair, Washington D.C. he wrote "Honor and Fidelity. The 65th Infantry in Korea" at the behest of the then-Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera, detailing the trials and tribulations of the U.S. Army's only all-Puerto Rican infantry regiment in the Korean War. The book has received stellar reviews for its insights in the Army's use of Puerto Rican soldiers in Korea and its faulty personnel policies during the war. He is also the On-Camera Historian for the PBS award-winning documentary "The Borinqueneers".

Colonel (Ret.) Villahermosa also authored "Hitler's Paratroopers. The Life and Battles of Rudolph Witzig" and has published several dozen articles on various aspects of military history, including women and minorities in the U.S. Army. He has spoken widely on the U.S. Army, the 65th Infantry Regiment in World War II and Korea, and National Security issues and has appeared on ABC News, Voice of America, ARISE television network and Fox Radio News.

Colonel (Ret.) Villahermosa holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from the United States Military Academy at West Point and Master's Degrees in both International Affairs and Philosophy of Political Science from Columbia University. He was also awarded a Certificate in Advanced Soviet Studies from Columbia University's prestigious Harriman Institute. He is a recipient of the Defense Superior Service Medal (with Oak Leaf Cluster), the Bronze Star Medal, the NATO Medal (for Bosnia and Afghanistan), and the French National Defense Service Medal (Bronze). Gilberto Villahermosa speaks Spanish and Russian. He and his wife Natalie live in New York's Hudson Valley. All three of their sons have served or are serving in the United States Army. His father, Jesus Maria Villahermosa, who was also born in Puerto Rico, served with the 65th Infantry during the Korean War.

Luis Quiros, M.P.A., M.S.W.
Community Organizer, Activist, Educator, Author
www.anothersmind.com
An Other's Mind (2011)
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In the middle of the 19th century Puerto Ricans began acquiring an identity beyond that of colonial subjects of Spain. The incidents depicted — slave insurrections, a cholera epidemic, hurricanes — are based on history that is largely unfamiliar.

“I wanted to write a big book with lots of characters, and I wanted to explore what it meant and what it means to be Puerto Rican,” and us, viewed as “Others” in these United States.

A not too distant event illustrates, one of millions, of which I will refer to shortly demonstrates the absence of our due to heroic men and womyn [women spelled with a “y”] who served these United States. One person or group is rewarded by merely being acknowledged, while we, Puerto Ricans, are not.

As it becomes clear, the concept of the 'other' is one of the central issues of the debate and needs further analysis. For some activists and theorists, 'to care for others' is 'the' human and Christian task per se, as for Puerto Ricans (see Quiros, *An Other's Mind*; 2011). Postcolonial critiques on 'the other' I believe should be mandated, instead of ignored. Why? Because it took me too long and I was too late to grasp my Puerto Rican grandfather's words, “No sabía que yo era negro hasta que llegue a este país”—I was unaware I was Black until I arrived in this country. Being bullied on a daily basis became normal...just for being Brown and Puerto Rican.

Proudly and somewhat sorry, that I can state that too few people even know that Puerto Rico was the first to embrace and address economic justice by incorporating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR] in their constitution (1952). Tracing the Montana constitution's provisions on human dignity to its origins in the UDHR, noted:

"The 1972 amendment to Montana's constitution, which included the term 'human dignity,' was drawn from Puerto Rico's constitution. During the drafting of Puerto Rico's constitution, the United Nations played a key role, both in inspiring provisions based on the UDHR and as a vehicle for attempted resolution of the Commonwealth's relationship to the United States."

My mother, undoubtedly, was teaching me resistance and in particular, the new postcolonial resistance model in order to lean towards a true democratic model. Most importantly, she kept me Puerto Rican.

My grandfather, my mother's father, fought in World War I, because the USA needed soldiers, so Puerto Ricans became citizens, though we could not vote for the president of the USA unless we lived stateside.

There has never been a war the USA was involved with that a brother, or "primo hermano" was not fighting. My younger brother died of Agent Orange while serving two tours in Viet Nam. My niece and nephews had to fight for receiving \$10,000 from Union Carbide because of their manufacturing of Agent Orange.

Identity politics took its modern form during the second half of the last century. It emerged as an emancipatory mode of political action and thinking based on the shared experience of injustice by particular groups - notably Blacks, womyn, gays, Latinos and American Indians. It is a movement born in a double negation: the rejection of rejection, through the proud, self-conscious union of those who have been defined as belonging to an excluded group.

It is precisely this focus on a particular group, on the significance of difference from the dominant other that disturbs many, on the left and right, and in the center. The traditional left is uncomfortable with conceptions of solidarity not based on class. The right has little patience with the radical reordering of what it views as natural, God-given relations and identities. Meanwhile, the individualism of the mainstream center, and its insistence that rights and redress apply equally to all citizens, is clearly at odds with notions of collective solidarity.

History is Written in the Present Tense

Speaking at the annual GrowCo conference, a startup-meets-successful-company-representatives gathering on Wednesday in Nashville, Tenn., the outspoken Mark Cuban, owner of the Dallas Mavericks, warned the audience that he planned to go "full Mark Cuban" on them and apologized in advance for anyone who might be upset about the profanity he might use, [Tennessean.com reports].

Cuban was participating in an onstage interview that included a range of topics. When the conversation turned to bigotry and Donald Sterling, Cuban had this to say: "I know I'm prejudiced, and I know I'm bigoted in a lot of different ways. If I see a black kid in a hoodie on my side of the street, I'll move to the other side of the street. If I see a white guy with a shaved head and tattoos [on the side he is on], I'll move back to the other side of the street. None of us have pure thoughts; we all live in glass houses," Tennessean.com reports.

Sixty-eight years of age, forty six years after the violence that defined 1968, and two graduate degrees were not nearly enough to have learned to defend myself against the effects of "power language" and to make better choices. Race and class were so deeply rooted definitions of this nation that a different focus was necessary in order to distinguish between forms of racism that are intentional and conscious and yet justified by nonracial arguments, and those that are unintentional using racially-based myths. The hardest to debate were the intentional racial comments hiding under nonracial logic—the racist component was easily deniable. Unsurprisingly, racial events and language were more troubling to me when directed *Other* people and communities. Therefore, while in search of the right questions to defend those with less power, the people I associated with or from whom I sought advice from consisted scholars, the well read and the poorest.

In time I learned how social and welfare policy, the law, and the reasoning behind the **absence of policy** made it easy to miss the detours I should have made to avoid the social traps and social retardants built on myths.

That why I am here to speak with you. To talk to you about the power engraved in the absence of policy, that deny us the recognition that is earned and what it is and feels like to be the “Other”.

As people of color, our experiences are many. Some of us are native to these lands now called the United States. Some of us are residents here due to our ancestors’ kidnapping and enslavement or because our families left our home countries to escape violent economic policies enacted by the US and other nations. We have not all experienced the same levels of abuse, poverty, or imprisonment. However, we are all survivors of colonization, a system that continues under global capitalism, war and occupation, and abuses at home such as racial profiling, the prison system, and severe budget cuts.

[An Other’s Mind; 238-239] On January 8, 2008, while driving I heard an apology over the radio from the state of New Jersey for “the wrongs inflicted by slavery and its after effects in the United States of America.” This was the first Northern state to apologize nearly one hundred sixty years after it abolished slavery. On January 9, there was news of a disability payment, approximately \$100,000, to a World War II veteran who had been traumatized by the war.

As a Fordham University professor I used both news items to open class dialogue—was there a way to connect them? “One ship he served aboard, the USS Savannah, was

attacked Sept. 11, 1943, and two hundred men were killed. MacDonald trembled visibly as he recalled trying to help badly injured shipmates and waiting in lifeboats for help to come ... 'I was scared to death,' he said. 'Planes were flying over my head like thunder and lightning.' ... He has suffered since from ... post-traumatic stress disorder ... the VA officially diagnosed him with non-service-related schizophrenia ...”

En mi Viejo San Juan; Pero un dia volveré. The song was written in 1942 for Estrada's brother who had been deployed to Panama during World War II and was feeling nostalgia for his Puerto Rico motherland. The song has become an anthem of Puerto Rican emigration to New York.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/En_mi_Viejo_San_Juan -

[cite_note-5](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvjgLJx8Fp8>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGufnPJvAFU> [I will not show or refer to this link.

However, its' history must never be forgotten].

I Know It's Unfair...But what does that mean to us?

My mother was aware before the creation of Puerto Rico as a Commonwealth, 1950–52, how this nation's focus on the accumulation of wealth created a country that demanded patriotism, exalted capitalism, but too often could not accommodate morality. She believed in God more than the US government. And in spite of the negativity toward Latinos, my parents quickly learned to navigate New York.

Contrary to the trend, it was my parents' decision to live among a community that looked and spoke like them. As children and young adults we were never told to dance around the raindrops to avoid the discrimination. If we did not succeed, it was our fault. Whether this was a form of denial or a strategy, we were not allowed to feel victimized. Ironically, my desire to be viewed differently from the Latino stereotype translated into showing support for White television family programming at my expense as well as all other communities of color. Not until my early twenties did start recognizing that by avoiding all commonalties—including the biological blood relationships—between our community and the Black community I was contributing to this nation's legacy of racism.

In 1951, pre-Brown v. Board of Education era, my parents pulled me out of first grade in a public school because if I arrived late I would be asked to leave the building. Unable to catch up to my parents' departing car I would walk around Harlem for the day. In parochial schools I learned God loved me; I had a lot to be thankful for and I shouldn't expect more. White kids were privy to the expectation they would make great doctors or lawyers some day.

A passion for preserving our culture was a constant in our home. Romantic Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Cuban boleros played continually on our record player. No doubt, the most loving moments I experienced were just sitting next to her as she duplicated Liberace's show on her piano, adding her own medley of romantic boleros; our native culture flourishing side by side with that of our chosen country of residency. She collected 78-rpm records, played the piano, never smoked or consumed alcohol,

and worked tirelessly to disguise the reality of our stress-filled social and economic condition. Among my most long lasting childhood memories were visiting El Barrio and La Marqueta with my mother in East Harlem's Park Avenue to buy only the freshest of produce items. There she taught me how to select fruits, vegetables, provisions, and the best meats and live poultry.

Our survival and earned recognition, critical for our children, rests solely on our passing down our Puerto Ricanism to our children. If one of us is not free, none of us are.

Like my mother did for me, you too must keep your children Puerto Rican. At that point our children will be receiving every metal and honor due instead of being placed in special education classes and prisons, disproportionately to other communities. You see, it is not just the Medal of Honor we must fight for. We must fight for the democracy that this nation was supposed to adopt. This country must be better than just a good idea. It's only up to us. What you do not do, falls as a burden on all of our children. Your child's smile is dependent on what the rest of you do or do not do.



65th Infantry Honor Task Force, Inc. [The Borinqueneers]

23 May 2014

Chairman
Committee on Veterans
New York City Council – Committee Room
City Hall
New York, NY

TESTIMONY FOR SUBMISSION- REFERENCE: Resolution No. 79, Resolution No.103,
Resolution No. 200.

Read by: Mr. Ruben Estrada, Deputy Director on behalf of Mr. Anthony Melé, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman and esteemed Committee Members:

Please accept my written testimony presented by my proxy Deputy Director Estrada and Executive Committee members representing me here in my unavoidable absence.

On behalf of the veterans from the 65th Infantry Regiment and Honor Task Force we Thank you for this invitation to participate in this hearing.

In regard to Resolution No. 79: we concur and support in principle the creation and presentation of a ticker tape parade to honor the veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. We will be glad to offer any assistance in the planning and protocols of such an event if called upon to do so.

Resolution No. 103: Resolution urging Congress to pass and the President to sign H.R. 1726 and S. 1174, to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment, known as the Borinqueneers.

The 65th Infantry Honor Task Force has been in support of the award of the Congressional Gold Medal since 2002. We have collaborated and assisted in several early drafts of this Bill with the Office of Congressman Pedro Pier-Luisi.

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Chairman

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Deputy Director

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Event Coordinator

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Retired 65th Infantry
Veterans – Puerto
Rico

Congress of Puerto
Rican Veterans

Borinqueneers Post
1951



65th Infantry Honor Task Force, Inc. [The Borinqueneers]

In regard to the proposed draft presented here, let us first commend the staff who apparently were diligent in their preparations. Please convey our compliments.

Upon close inspection, we would only suggest 5 modifications:

1. Change the word "urging" Congress.. to .. "Recommending" Congress.
2. Change MSG Negron "will receive" to "was decorated posthumously".
3. Remove the paragraph: " Whereas, other military units.."
4. Remove the word: "segregation".
5. Replace the word: "Imperative"..that congress to "responsibility of"..

The award of the Congressional Gold Medal is the highest decoration the Congress can bestow on a military organization or individual civilian for a "unique distinction based on merit alone."

The unique distinction of the 65th Infantry Regiment beyond any other past awardee is they conducted what became the last battalion sized bayonet charge in American military history. They share this sole distinction with only the 3rd U.S. Infantry [The Old Guard], Escort to the President.

Additionally, the CGM is not a contest to be compared with past awardees as each organization was confronted by their own unique sets of challenges and the manner in which they overcame it is attributed to each of them alone.

Additionally, the soldiers of the 65th Infantry Regiment of Puerto Rico that engaged in the battles cited, were not college educated fighter pilots, nor were they specially trained, elite, intelligence code-talkers, nor first generation descendents of a country at war with the U.S., nor were they super-soldiers equipped like SEAL TEAM 6.



65th Infantry Honor Task Force, Inc. [The Borinqueneers]

They were on average 19 year old rifle-men, infantrymen, 'mud grunts', as the infantry are affectionately called by their peers; who faced astounding odds with valor fueled by pure guts, armed with bayonets, and fought their enemy hand to hand. Their deeds elevated them into a category all their own. They earned the recommendation for the CGM based on unique merit alone. There are none with whom they can be compared today, except maybe the Spartan 300 hundred, led by King Leonides at the battle of Thermopolaye.

The Congressional Gold Medal process is at a delicate stage at this moment. Last Monday the Bill was introduced to the House floor for a vote. The outcome remains to be seen. In that regard, may we gently suggest, that the CGM should be recommended by this prestigious body and refrain from being "urged" or "forced" for fear of being misconstrued as "demanded."

Some like to sell the issue of the Regiment being "segregated" is reason to award them the CGM. We contend that debate forum is a scholastic one, best conducted at a University with a panel of experts and veterans. Our position is based in history and a soldier's code of honor, we humbly request be respected.

Fact one: President Truman signed the de-segregation bill into law back in 1948. Segregation in the military was a federal crime in 1950.

Fact two: The 65th Infantry Regiment was native to Puerto Rico, by nature they would be predominantly composed of soldiers native to their State of origin, as much as a unit from Texas would be primarily Texans.

Fact three: The Killed-In-Action roster for the 65th Infantry list the names and places of birth of "Borinqueneers" who were not native to Puerto Rico but none-the-less full blood brothers to the Regiment. To deny them their place of honor alongside their gallant fallen will never be tolerated by the veterans, ever!



65th Infantry Honor Task Force, Inc. [The Borinqueneers]

Mr. Chairman and Committee members; let no one make the mistake that we are begging for medals, that we are begging for recognition, that we are begging for validation.

Valor is not measured by metallurgy. Courage is not validated by proclamations or resolutions.

These are things of the spirit. Honor means to do what is right, even if you never receive credit for it nor will be rewarded because of it.

The prudent guidance we can offer this Committee when deliberating how best to represent, respect and honor the soldiers of the 65th Infantry Regiment; is to convey their spirit of defiance in the face of the enemies they fought in battle, the discrimination they fought in society, and the worst enemy of all, the curse of self-pity they abhor and reject.

Simply, respect us and reserve pity for the enemies we are called upon to combat in defense of our countrymen.

My team are open to your questions and comments. Thank you.



Anthony Melé

Anthony Melé
Chairman
65th Infantry Honor Task Force